

Oswestry Borough
Council / Shropshire
Council

**Delivering a Major
Employment Site in
Oswestry**

Report of Findings

**TECHNICAL EXTRACT FROM
CONFIDENTIAL REPORT**

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Delivering a Major
Employment Site in
Oswestry**

Report of Findings

August 2009

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Introduction

Oswestry Borough Council and Advantage West Midlands are increasingly concerned about the inability of the town to respond to requests for employment land due to a lack of available sites. In addition, two of the town's key employers are looking to relocate within the local area to allow them to expand their business operations.

Whilst the development planning process has allocated sufficient employment land to meet future needs, this has not come forward for a variety of reasons. If land is not found quickly, then there is concern that not only will future inward investment and associated employment opportunities be placed at risk, but the town could face the loss of two existing major businesses to locations where land is available to support their expansion.

As a result of previous work, Oswestry Borough Council had identified a potential location at Mile End, Oswestry, which appeared to have the potential to be quickly brought forward to meet the immediate employment land needs of two of the town's major employers and also the smaller requirement from Advantage West Midlands.

The two employers in question are each looking for land to accommodate a B2 general industrial operation. In addition Advantage West Midlands (AWM) requires 'enterprise' land for B1 / B2 uses. This gives a total requirement of 12.9 hectares.

The Purpose of this Report

In September 2008 Arup were commissioned to undertake a scoping study to explore how best to bring forward 12.9 hectares of land at Mile End, Oswestry. The purpose of the study was to establish the nature of the issues which require to be addressed (both physical and in policy terms) and the technical work necessary to support the submission of an outline application.

As a result of issues raised during this work, the brief was expanded to encompass the consideration of a range of other options and alternative approaches to securing the speedy delivery of the necessary employment land.

The purpose of this report is to document the relevant issues associated with the delivery of the land at Mile End (to the east of the A5). The report then moves to examine a wider range of alternative sites (primarily based around the Mile End site, but also including the allocated employment site at Weston Farm) with the aim of developing a better understanding of the options for overcoming some of the barriers to delivery within a 12 – 18 month period.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for further work which will be required to support the evidence base necessary to take forward whichever option is decided upon.

Background and Context

Oswestry is a long established thriving market town and a major source of local employment. The town centre contains the Council's offices and a number of speciality shops. There is a livestock market located on the edge of the town and major industrial estates have been developed to the south east of the town at Maesbury Road and Maes-y-Clawd.

Compared with the national average there is a higher proportion of people who are classified as working in routine and semi-routine occupations and a lower proportion of higher paid managerial and professional occupations. Average gross weekly earnings are below those for Shropshire and the West Midlands.

Small and micro businesses make a major contribution to the Borough's economy. Major employers include British Telecom, the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital, Richard Burbidge & Co (decorative wood products) and Elements Europe (manufacturers of modular pods).

Advantage West Midlands have also identified a need within the town for a small enterprise park to support the delivery of new employment opportunities.

All parties are seeking to secure a prominent and visible employment location where they can deliver a high quality development.

Advantage West Midlands have advised that there is a need for circa 2 hectares of additional readily available employment land for 'enterprise' purposes within Oswestry, to meet the needs of businesses. They have been unable to secure a suitable site to date.

In 2005 AWM secured outline planning consent from Oswestry Borough Council for the development of a health village, in partnership with the Shropshire Primary Care Trust, on land known as the Five Acre Site. This land was subsequently registered as a Village Green by Shropshire County Council, a designation which protects the site from development and has resulted in the need to identify an alternative and deliverable location.

The challenge is therefore to identify a major employment site within Oswestry which meets the needs and relocation requirements of the two major employers and allows for the provision of at least 2 hectares of small enterprise space for Advantage West Midlands.

The site should be capable of early delivery, ideally within 12 – 18 months. To achieve this, the site should be either in accordance with local planning policy, or if it is considered a 'departure' from the adopted Local Plan, it should not raise any major planning issues which may require consideration at a public inquiry. In particular, the site should have the support of the Highways Agency (HA) to avoid potential delays. Ownership is a significant factor in the ability to achieve the early delivery of a site. Clearly avoiding the need for the Council to acquire land, either by negotiation or through the use of compulsory purchase powers would be a distinct advantage and would avoid the risk associated with potential delays.

In terms of location, there is a strong preference for a site where a flagship employment development can be delivered. The cost of providing the necessary infrastructure should not be prohibitive and the site should have no major environmental constraints.

Planning Policy Context – Employment Land

The need to progress the ideal site swiftly in order to respond to the needs of the two key employers is central to this study. This means that potential delays in bringing the site forward must be considered carefully. The proposed development will require planning consent from the Local Planning Authority and as such any application will be judged against planning policy.

This section of the report focuses on the planning policy background so far as it relates to the provision of employment land within Oswestry, and explores how this might impact upon any application for development of a large employment site. It focuses on the changes which have occurred since the previous report by Arup in 2007.

4.1 National Planning Policy Draft PPS4

Planning for a Sustainable Future (May 2007), proposed a new policy framework for encouraging sustainable economic development, including a commitment to publish a new planning policy statement on economic development. In December 2007, the Government published a consultation draft Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Development (or 'PPS4'). This has since been followed by a further consultation on a new draft PPS4: Planning for Prosperous Economies (2009) which brings together the Government's key planning policies relating to the economy. The consultation ends on 28 July 2009.

The draft PPS notes that local authorities should "ensure that site allocations for economic development, particularly if they are for single or restricted uses, are not carried forward from one version of the development plan to the next without

⁶ Assessment of potential employment sites in Oswestry May 2007 ⁷ Draft Planning Policy Statement 4: Sustainable Economic Development Dec 2007

evidence of the need and reasonable prospect of their take up during the plan period. If there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for the allocated economic use during the plan period, the allocation should not be retained, and wider economic uses or alternative uses, such as housing, should be actively considered".

It also notes that in rural areas "Most new development should continue to be located in or on the edge of existing settlements as this facilitates best use of existing infrastructure and delivers sustainable development."

When "determining applications for economic development other than main town centre uses, local planning authorities should:

- consider proposals for economic development other than town centre uses, favourably unless there is good reason to believe that the social, economic and/or environmental costs of development are likely to outweigh the benefits;
- take a constructive approach to changes of use where there is no likelihood of demonstrable harm;
- adopt an evidence-based approach in determining applications for proposals other than for town centre uses which do not have the specific support of plan policies by:
 - a) weighing market and other economic information alongside environmental and social information;
 - b) taking full account of any longer term benefits, as well as the costs, of development, such as job creation or improved productivity including any wider benefits to national, regional or local economies; and
 - c) considering whether those proposals help to meet the wider objectives of the local development framework."

4.2 West Midlands RSS Phase Two Revisions⁸

The draft Phase Two Revisions to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy were published in December 2007 and were the subject of an Examination in Public in late spring 2009. Of relevance to this report are the proposed employment requirements for the period to 2026.

In terms of employment land provision within Oswestry, the RSS Phase Two Revision draws attention to the need to:

- Facilitate development that meets local needs including employment, economic change and affordable housing (RSS Policy PA1);
- Develop and maintain a readily available employment land portfolio offering a range of sites including subregional (10-20 ha); good quality (0.4 – 10 ha); and general employment sites (less than 0.4 ha (RSS Policy PA 6)); and
- Provide a 5 year reservoir of employment land (RSS Policy PA6A)

Policy PA6A differs from the existing approach as set down in RSS11 (Jan 2008) in proposing a district based five year reservoir of readily available employment land provision, together with an indicative allocation to 2026.

Although based upon past trends, the five-year reservoir aspect of the approach has been welcomed by Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM), who recognise that in some areas “*the re-filling could be much more frequent than others.*” GOWM also consider that core strategies should identify their prime employment locations (existing and planned). In terms of the amount of land required within Shropshire to meet employment needs, GOWM has indicated

that it is content with the allocation in the RSS Phase Two Revisions.

	Indicative Long Term Requirement 2006-2021 (hectares)	Indicative Annual Requirement (hectares)
Bridgnorth District	18	1.2
North Shropshire District	66	4.4
Oswestry Borough	24	1.6
Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough	84	5.6
South Shropshire District	24	1.6
Shropshire	216	14.4

(RSS Policy PA6A Employment Land Provision – Preferred Option)

Figure 4.1 RSS Employment Land Target for Shropshire

⁸ West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Dec 2007
⁹ GOWM response to RSS Phase Two Revision Dec 2008

Policy PA6A: Employment Land Provision

¹⁴Local Planning Authorities should make provision for a continuing five-year reservoir of readily available employment land outside town centres throughout the plan period. In order to ensure the availability of land to meet this requirement Local Planning Authorities in preparing their development plan should also take account of, and where appropriate, make provision for likely longer-term employment land requirements taking account of the need to control the release and identification of land through the Plan, Monitor, and Manage process. In meeting both the five-year reservoir and longer-term requirements priority should be given to the identification and development of brownfield land in accordance with

Policy PA1. Full consideration of anticipated brownfield recycling should be taken into account. Table 4 includes district level requirements of both new and redeveloped employment land for the five-year reservoir across the Region and indicative amounts of land required in the longer term. In respect of the latter the amounts have been set cautiously to avoid the unnecessary release of large amounts of land. Local Planning Authorities should, however, see these longer term requirements as indicative and subject to testing and possible revision as part of Core Strategies. In preparing their development plans, local authorities, in conjunction with AWM, should take account of:

- i) the needs of existing businesses and take account of the needs of inward investors
- ii) the need to ensure that employment opportunities are accessible to areas of significant new housing development
- iii) the strategic priority given to Regeneration Zones and High Technology Corridors in meeting employment needs within the Region iv) the potential for the maximum use of recycled land for employment purposes to meet these needs but to recognise that the use of some

greenfield land may be required where all other alternatives have been considered v) that in all cases land allocations should take account of the need to protect and enhance the Region's natural, built and historic environment vi) a classification of employment sites within their areas according to the hierarchy in PA6 both in development plans and for the purposes of regional monitoring through the RELS database vii) any deficiencies in the supply of land, especially within the MUDAs, and action required to remedy this and viii) the extent to which office developments should be restricted on certain sites (in accordance with PA11).”

4.3 West Midlands Economic Strategy (2007) 'Connecting to Success'

West Midlands Economic Strategy (2007) 'Connecting to Success' identifies three strategic foci for regional economic development – Business, People and Place. It also recognises the importance of Markets Towns such as Oswestry in providing the spatial focus for promoting employment, investment and services.

The Sub National Review of Economic Development proposes an enhanced role for Local Authorities in leading sub-regional and local economic development and in the preparation of local economic assessments to support the Single Integrated Regional Strategies, alongside their own Core Strategy policies.

4.4 Relevant Local Planning Policy Issues

The extant Local Plan is the Oswestry Borough Local Plan (1996 - 2006), adopted July 1999. This was 'saved' by the Secretary of State for a period of three years, until September 2007 following which a further Direction has been issued which extends the life of most of the policies until such a time that the development plan documents of the LDF are adopted with policies to replace them. The 'saved' employment policies are listed in Table 4.1.

The extension of 'saved policies' does not indicate that the Secretary of State would endorse these policies if presented as new policy. It is only intended to ensure continuity in the plan-led system and a stable planning framework locally, and in particular, a continual supply of land for development. Where policies were originally adopted some time ago, it is likely that material considerations, in particular the emergence of new national and regional policy and also new evidence, will be afforded considerable weight in decisions.

The letter accompanying the Direction makes clear that prior to completion of the relevant DPDs, "maximum use should be made of national and regional policy especially given the development plan status of the Regional Spatial Strategy".

Policy Number	Policy Title
LE1	Maesbury Road Industrial Estate
LE2	Land at Weston Farm, Oswestry
LE3	Land at Mile Oak Industrial Estate
LE5	Land at Llanymynech
LE6	Land at Ifron Industrial Estate, St. Martins
LE8	Land at Bank Top, St Martins
LE9	New Employment Development
LE10	Conversion of Buildings for Employment Use
LE11	Extensions to Employment Premises
LE12	Farm Diversification
LE13	Rednal Industrial Estate
LE14	Kinnerley
LE15	New Road Haulage Depots
LE16	Extensions to Existing Road Haulage Depots

The Local Plan establishes a need for some 34 hectares to be allocated between 1993 and 2006, 19 hectares of which is required to be in the form of new industrial sites. The plan notes that (para 5.17)

"It is important to provide a range and choice of locations suitable to meet the needs of industry and commerce, and which can be reasonably expected to come forward for development during the plan period" and therefore allocates additional land to allow for a choice of sites and sites which may not become available for development during the plan period. The total amount of land allocated is 24 hectares. The approach taken to site identification is (para 5.18) "to direct the bulk of new industrial development to existing areas of established industrial character, which can be extended without adverse effect on the character of the area and the amenity of any nearby residential areas, which have good access to the Trunk Road network, and which are well served by public transport and are convenient to their workforce, thereby reducing the need to travel long distances to work."

Two new sites in the urban area (Weston Farm and south of Mile Oak Industrial Estate) are put forward in response to the likely need for additional industrial land during the plan period, as set out in Policies LE1 and LE2.

The Maesbury Road Industrial Estate (Policy LE1) is currently in the course of development. However land at Weston Farm (Policy LE2) has yet to come forward. The 'saving' of Policy LE2 as recently as 2007 can be taken to suggest that up until 18 months ago there was a realistic chance that this site would come forward for development.

Policy LE2: Land At Weston Farm, Oswestry

The site of 12 hectares adjacent to Weston Farm, Oswestry is allocated for employment development during the plan period as the first phase in establishing a larger industrial estate of 22 hectares in the Weston Farm Area. The whole site will be developed according to a comprehensive plan to include a high degree of landscaping and screening.

5.23 -This is the major employment land allocation to serve the town of Oswestry. A site of 22 hectares is indicated on the Plan, although only 12 hectares will be required within the plan period. This is done to indicate the eventual extent of development and to allow it to be designed comprehensively. The site is situated to the West of the existing Mile Oak Industrial Estate, over the railway line. It is envisaged that the site would be accessed from a new roundabout on the Maesbury Road and via the existing Cadwallader depot, requiring adequate means of crossing the railway line. The applicant will be asked to produce a Traffic Impact Assessment to judge the need for further off-site road improvement.

5.24 -The site will be developed according to a development brief produced by the Council to establish the phasing of development and the type of development envisaged, its layout, design, construction materials and landscaping. A comprehensive planting scheme along the Western boundary of the site will be required in order to screen the town residential areas to the west and to protect the character of the adjoining countryside beyond Weston Lane.

5.25 -The area is particularly sensitive to the risk of pollution and is located on a major aquifer of high vulnerability which represents a valuable asset in terms of water resources. Attention is drawn to the provisions of Policy NE11 (Watercourses) and NE12 (Water Resources and New Developments).

4.5 Shropshire Core Strategy

From 1st April 2009 the new Shropshire Council took over the planning functions of the six former local authorities within the county, including Oswestry. In advance of this change, the local planning authorities had been working together to begin developing the Shropshire Local Development Framework.

Priority in this process was given to the Shropshire Core Strategy and to this end an **Issues and Options Report** was published for consultation in January 2009. This document built upon previous work undertaken by the various authorities and a series of Topic Papers which had been consulted on in 2008.

A **Policy Directions Document** is due to be consulted on during August and September 2009 prior to preparation and publication of a Final Plan in February 2010. Following submission to the Secretary of State and an independent examination, the Core Strategy is due to be adopted in early 2011.

Previous work by Oswestry Borough Council

In 2005 an Employment Land Review was undertaken by the BE¹⁰ Group which advised that the Borough had "an existing employment land supply of just under 30 hectares. The land supply in terms of location, if not in terms of availability, is reasonably well suited to need."

It noted that there was "however, a shortage of employment land to meet needs to 2021. An additional 6-12 hectares of employment land needs to be identified".

The report considered that it was unlikely that two allocated employment sites at Weston Farm, Oswestry (12 ha) and at Llanyrnnech (1.58 ha) would come forward for development, and advised that "To prevent this causing an even greater degree of undersupply, Weston Farm may need to be

reallocated to a more readily developable location. This could be partially satisfied by the possible release of 7 ha at the Smithfield Livestock Market."

Joint Topic Papers Economy

Feedback from the Economy Topic Paper highlighted, amongst other matters, the following:

- Need for a portfolio of suitable, available and deliverable employment sites;
- Too many sites are of poor quality and are neither achievable nor deliverable;
- There is a current shortage of suitable and available employment land in Oswestry;
- Contribution of existing employment sites in relation to the local economy and consideration given to those sites which have had an industrial classification but have little prospect of physical development for alternative uses; and

- The planning, management, monitoring and maintenance of the employment land portfolio to meet the needs and demands of the local economy.

Issues and Options Report – January 2009

The Shropshire Core Strategy Issues and Options Report put forward five strategic options for consultation, alongside a number of 'choices'.

'Choice 5' related to Oswestry's direction for growth. Here the key question was 'How and where should Oswestry accommodate future housing development?'

Land between Shrewsbury Road, Middleton Road and the A5/A483 Oswestry bypass was identified as having "the potential to accommodate around 750 dwellings as part of a mixed use development of housing, employment, open space and other facilities." (see Figure 4.1 overleaf). The alternative

¹⁰ Employment Land Review BE Group 2005

was to distribute development around the edge of the town on a number of small / medium sites. Paragraph 6.92 acknowledged that "The scale of new housing development will need to be matched by new employment land provision, of which there is already a shortage

'Choice 6' related to Employment Land provision. The key question posed was "What level of employment land provision should the Core Strategy make" with the key options being to make provision in line with the RSS requirement, or to support a higher level of provision based on local experience.

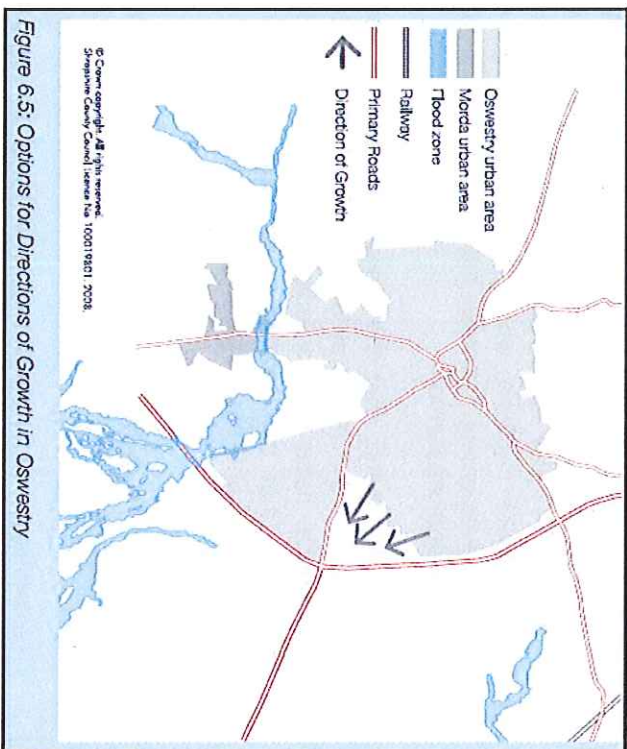


Figure 4.1 Option A –planned urban extension to south east of Oswestry

Policy Directions Document – July 2009

The 'Policy Directions' document is the next stage in developing the Shropshire Core Strategy. The 'Policy Directions' consultation is the second significant stage for

public and stakeholder involvement in the development of the Core Strategy.

This document confirms the preference for "a sustainable urban extension to the south east of the town, in combination with, and as part of a wider approach of accommodating future development which prioritises the use of previously developed sites together with the allocation of suitable smaller / medium scale Greenfield sites on the periphery of Oswestry to meet needs, as required. Land to the south-east of the town is considered to be the optimum strategic direction for growth."

The document also notes that "Land fronting Shrewsbury Road would make a good employment location, prominent and highly accessible and a natural extension of the town's key employment area (Oswestry Employment Land Study – BE Group 2006)."

The Policy Directions consultation will run from 10th August to 2nd October 2009.

4.6 The Annual Monitoring Reports

The 2007 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for Oswestry recorded an overall employment land supply of just over 30 hectares in the Borough. This was located on 15 sites in 7 main locations across the Borough (70% being within the town of Oswestry). The majority of sites are described as “readily available, either under construction now, soon to be developed, or in the process of being brought forward for development.”

The report records doubts “about the viability and availability of the *Weston Farm site in Oswestry (site LE3 – 12 ha), a key Local Plan allocation which makes up a significant portion of the Borough’s current employment land portfolio. The site is subject to a longstanding highway access constraint.*”

During the plan period (1997-2007) just over 8 hectares of former employment land has been lost to other uses at an average rate of 0.8 hectares per annum, of which 64% was for housing.

The Joint Shropshire AMR 2008 was published in December 2008.¹¹ In terms of employment land supply, the report notes (p23) that:

“As 1st April 2008, Oswestry Borough Council had an overall employment land supply of just over 30 hectares spread across 15 sites. Class B2 accounts for 82% of the outstanding total amount, with the largest site being a 12 hectare greenfield site at Weston Farm. Previous doubts regarding the viability and deliverability of this site have re-emerged following an expected application that failed to come to fruition. The allocation of this site will need to be reviewed as part of the Shropshire LDF.”

¹¹ Shropshire Annual Monitoring Report 2007 – 2008 Dec 2008

4.7 Oswestry Employment Sites Assessment (BE Group Draft Report – October 2008)

This draft report reviews the supply and demand for employment land in the town and Borough of Oswestry to 2026. It assesses how much employment land is needed; considers whether the existing employment land meets this need; and then reviews the possible options to bring forward new and alternative development sites.

The report states that the West Midlands RSS Phase Two Revision identifies a requirement for the Borough of some 38.3

– 41.6 ha of employment land for the Borough for the period 2008 to 2026. The existing employment land supply amounts to some 13.8 ha. This excludes two significant allocations in the Oswestry Borough Local Plan (1999), namely Weston Farm (12 ha) and Old Coalyard, Llanymynech (1.58 ha) which the report considers not capable of viable development. However the report does not provide evidence to support this assertion.

The report notes that the Borough therefore needs to find an additional 24.5-27.8 ha net for the period 2008 to 2026 to meet both the overall need and to replace unviable sites. The report also considers that the Smithfield site (previously seen as a future allocation) is unlikely to come forward for development over the next 2-4 years.

The report considers that there is a need not only for enough employment land to meet the longer term needs (to 2026), but also for land that can be serviced and made available quickly,

i.e. within the next 12-24 months, to meet the needs of two of the town’s key employers with immediate company relocation requirements for which there are currently no suitable sites.

4.8 Summary of Key Issues

- Emerging national economic development policy notes that where there is little prospect of an allocated economic site coming forward during a plan period, the allocation should not be retained.
- The WMM RSS identifies the need to maintain a readily available employment land portfolio and a five year reservoir of employment land, together with an indicative allocation to 2026. In the case of Oswestry this translates to a long term requirement of 24 hectares (2006-2026) and an indicative annual requirement of 1.6 hectares.
- The majority of the employment policies within the Local Plan have been 'saved' by the Secretary of State, including the allocation of land at Weston Farm (Policy LE2);
- The Shropshire Core Strategy Issues and Options report builds upon work undertaken by Oswestry Borough Council. Choice 5 identifies a potential mixed use urban extension to accommodate 750 dwellings, employment, open space and other facilities to the south west of the town.
- The Annual Monitoring Reports raise the prospect of the de-allocation of the major employment site at Weston Farm.
- The draft Oswestry Employment Sites Assessment identifies the need for employment land in both the short and longer terms.
- The timescale for adoption of the Core Strategy and delivery of a Site Allocations DPD, mean that it is unlikely that the extant Local Plan policies will be replaced in sufficient time to progress the identification

of a suitable site alternative through the development plan process.

- The exceptional circumstances faced by the Oswestry Borough Council and Advantage West Midlands in securing a readily deliverable and viable employment land, of sufficient size to accommodate the relocation and expansion of the two of the town's key businesses, is considered of sufficient importance as to justify the identification of a suitable site outwith the development plan process.
- The strength of case for development of an 'unallocated' site is based upon the economic need of the two major employers and the town of Oswestry and is supported primarily by national planning policy.
- The 2008 AMR demonstrates an intention to consider the de-allocation of land at Weston Farm as part of the Shropshire LDF process. This will require the identification of a replacement employment site if the targets set by the RSS are to be delivered.

Assessment of Potential Major Employment Sites in Oswestry

In 2007¹² Arup were commissioned by Oswestry Borough Council to assess four sites which had been identified as having potential to meet the need for additional employment land. These sites were:

- Land at Mile End, two parcels of land east and west of A5;
- Land at Weston Farm;
- Smithfield Livestock Market; and
- Land off Whittington Road.

The four sites were evaluated in terms of their potential contribution to meet the employment land needs of the Borough.

The report concluded that the most appropriate site for new employment development within Oswestry was the Smithfield Livestock Market, followed by the sites at Mile End and Whittington Road. The land at Weston Farm performed poorly against the criteria used. Whilst the Livestock Market site was seen as the best site, its size would not be sufficient to meet the needs of the town's two key employers and Advantage West Midlands, added to which it was understood that the landowners were not looking to develop the site for employment but rather for higher value uses.

Land at Mile End performed well against the criteria. The land benefited from having a proactive landowner, prepared to bring these sites forward to address the problems facing the employment market currently in Oswestry.

Land at Mile End also well related to emerging ideas relating to the proposed area of residential growth within Oswestry

Assessment of Potential Employment Sites (Stage one) Report. Arup 2007

(subsequently developed to form the subject of a 'choice' in the Shropshire Core Strategy issues and Options Report – see previous section). The two parcels of land each have the advantage of frontages to the A5, allowing a high quality gateway development to be delivered, which will impact on perceptions of the town as a place to do business. They are also of sufficient size to have a significant, positive impact on meeting employment land provision targets and could accommodate the current urgent requirements.

The land off Whittington Road also benefits from being close to the existing settlement boundary within the A5, is deliverable in the short term, of a significant size to meet requirements, in close proximity to the existing employment area and has sufficient local infrastructure capacity to be served by the existing road network. However, its location close to the Oswestry Hill Fort is a major constraint, and a high quality, low impact development would be required, limiting the capacity of the site.

The land at Weston Farm did not perform well against the site assessment criteria. In particular, it suffers from delivery constraints due to the lack of access caused by the poor road network in this area and the adjacent railway line. The potential to lever in wider benefits and create sustainable links with the proposed growth areas are also reduced as a result.

Stage Two of the Arup report¹³ looked in more detail at the two Mile End Sites. The major constraint affecting both sites is access, due to their location on the A5 trunk road close to Mile End Island. The Highways Agency require that the free flow of traffic and safety of the trunk road network would not be compromised by development, while Shropshire CC accepted that site access to the western parcel of land would be from a local road. Six access options were examined, two of which appeared to offer workable solutions – an enlarged island and an underpass. The presence of extra high and high voltage

Deliverability report (Stage Two) Arup 2007

power cables which span the western parcel of land was seen as the main site infrastructure constraint on this larger site. At a cost it should be possible to ground the lower voltage (33,000 and 11,000V overhead cables and bury them around the edge of the east site, or below a primary road within the development), however this would be very expensive for the 132,000V overhead cables. The remaining physical constraints investigated would, on the basis of the work undertaken appear to be matters which could, through either design or provision of connections to services and utilities, be overcome more easily accommodated.

Taking Forward Land at Mile End

Following on from the 2007 study, Oswestry Borough Council (OBC) requested further work to scope out the requirements for a planning application for one of the two parcels of land that had formed the site identified through the earlier Arup study at Mile End. The parcel of land subject of this study was the larger of the two fields (located to the east and north of the A5) also known as Field Two (see plan overleaf).

The aim of the study was to establish whether it would be possible to accommodate the requirements of the two major employers and AWM on this single site, accessed via an enlarged island.

In addition to desk and field based research, discussions have been held with officers from OBC, the Highways Agency (HA), Shropshire County Council (SCC) and Advantage West Midlands (AWM) to identify the key issues associated with bringing forward the site.

6.1 The key findings

Access

As the A5 forms part of the trunk road network discussions with, and gaining the support of, the Highways Agency and Shropshire County Council Highways Team are fundamental to the success of any proposal. The HA have reservations about 'the site', given that it is a departure from the Local Plan that included an alternative site (land at Weston Farm) upon which they had been consulted.

The HA require justification as to why land at Mile End is now under consideration given a 'saved' Local Plan allocation on which there has been recent discussion. The HA note that access directly from a trunk road is against policy, and as such all other options would need to be thoroughly investigated to demonstrate that direct access from the trunk road was the only viable option. The HA advised that the review should

include consideration of access from the north via Middleton Road and from the west via Shrewsbury Road and an underpass under the A5 (this was the HA preferred option in the former study). Other constraints including cost, impact on utility apparatus, third party land issues etc should also be considered.

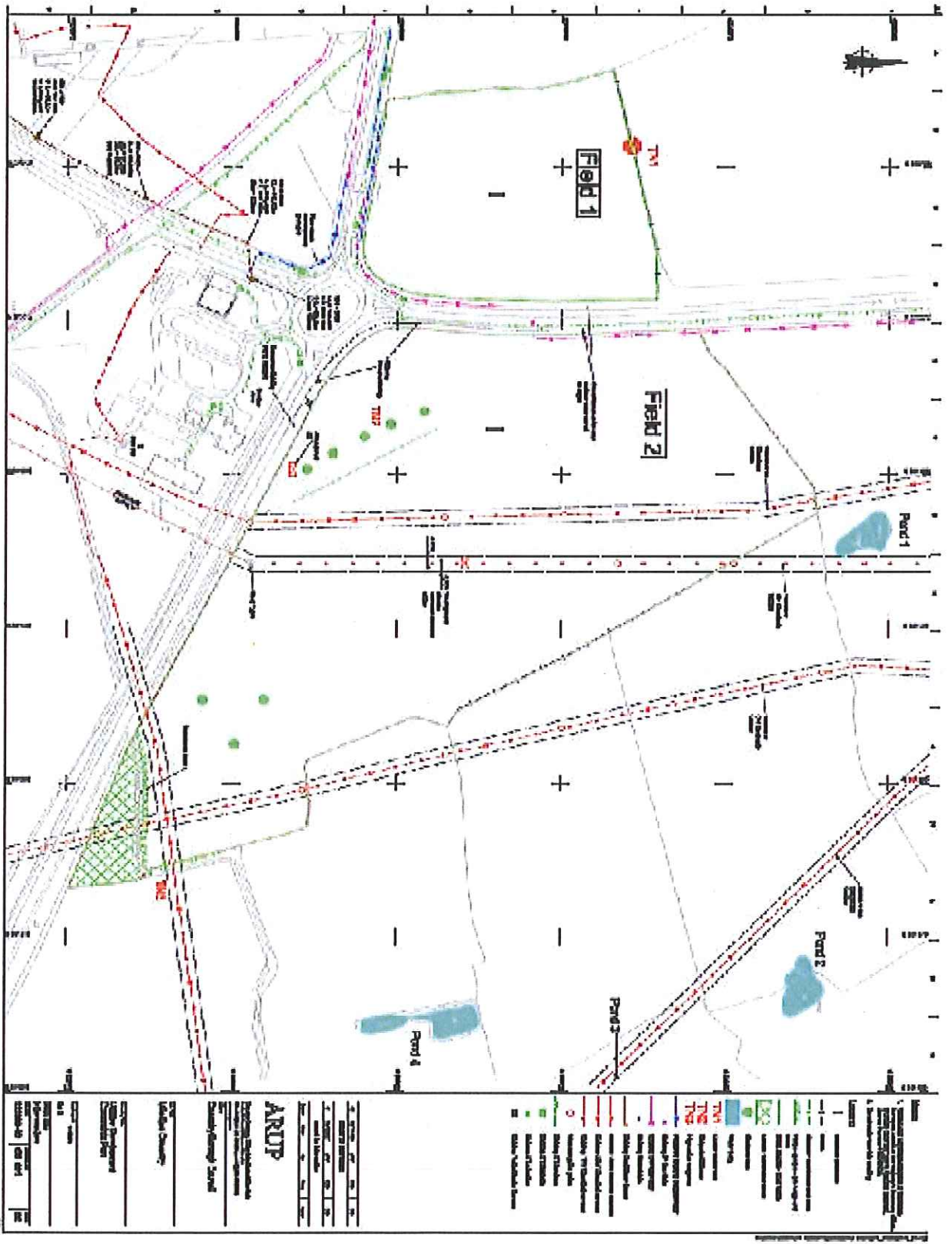


Photograph Mile End island

The HA indicated that if there was a robust planning case and direct access from the trunk road was justified, then they would consider proposals to accommodate the development impact. The HA advise that that they have journey time reliability targets to achieve and that any mitigation proposals would need to maintain the flow of traffic.

Neither OBC nor SCC supports access from Middleton Road. This is a rural type road with narrow lane widths, passing through residential areas and is not appropriate for the type of development proposed. The underpass solution involves acquiring third party land, will be costly and is likely to require junction improvements to the trunk road.

Figure 6.1 Land at Mile End



Direct access off the trunk road does have practical disadvantages for pedestrians and cyclists who would have to cross the A5 trunk road. A postcode sample suggests approximately 35% of workers at Richard Burbridge & Co travel from Oswestry and would have to make this movement.

If access directly off the trunk road (Mile End Roundabout) was acceptable, then the solution is likely to involve enlarging the junction, which may involve significant work to services, land take and signalisation. Work may also be required to other junctions.

Utilities

The site is heavily constrained by the presence of extra Extra High Voltage (132,000V and 33,000V) and High Voltage (11,000V) overhead cables. Amendments to the EHV system would incur significant developer costs. Diversion is however possible and cost estimates for the 132kV route are circa £990,000 and the 33kV route would be circa £70,000¹⁴. There is a secondary 132kV route to the east of the site boundary (again not easy to divert) and would attract the same ballpark figure £1M. If not buried, the proposed development may have to be built around the remaining 132,000V overhead cables and, assuming a cable height of 4m, this would equate to a minimum offset distance of 6m which has been annotated onto the Constraints Plan.

Burying the cables around the edge of the site will reduce the developable area of the site. The existing overhead electrical cables on wooden pylons are sized for agricultural vehicles and movement below them by large articulated vehicles would require the cables being raised onto taller steel pylons. The cost for raising the cables on new pylons over the affected area could be in the region of £0.5M for a 132kV cable run.

Manweb have informally stated that the supply for the proposed site could be met from the existing sub-station situated in the existing services area to the south of Mile End roundabout.

BT have infrastructure in and around the site, and it is not envisaged that there will be significant diversion required although the capacity will need to be confirmed by BT. Given the remote location of the site other telecoms companies, such as Virgin Media (Former NTL/Telewest) may not wish to serve the site given the distance from their core infrastructure network.

The proposed development will necessitate a small protection of land in the north-west corner of Field Two for the existing local High Pressure Wales and West Utilities gas apparatus. Any diversion would attract high costs and it is recommended that the small section of land should not be affected. Given the high pressure gas mains in the local area, any gas supply to the site would require a pressure reducing station (Medium Pressure to Low Pressure gas supply) to be constructed with a connection from the Medium Pressure gas main to the west of Mile End Roundabout.

For Severn Trent Water (STW) to undertake an assessment of water supply provision, a developer enquiry service must be completed. Given the early site appraisal, it is not necessary to commission STW to undertake a study yet and this should be carried out during the next detailed phase. Any new water mains would need to be connected to the existing main located in Shrewsbury Road, west of Mile End roundabout. The capacity of this water main will need to be confirmed by Severn Trent Water upon detailed knowledge of the proposed masterplan demands.

¹⁴ Emails in Appendix B from Scottish Power

Ecology

The site comprises improved grassland which is managed for sheep and cattle grazing. It supports a limited diversity of common plant species and is of low ecological value. Four ponds with suitable connecting habitat for amphibian movement were recorded within 500m of the site. There is potential for Great Crested Newt to use these four ponds as breeding sites, particularly because this species has been recorded elsewhere within the Borough.

The hedgerows at the site are likely to support a range of species, including nest sites for common birds. The old laid hedgerow to the west of the site and the overgrown hedgerows with mature hedgerows either side of the old trackway to the south-east are of intrinsic value; the latter being of high ecological value.

The scattered mature trees, particularly the Pedunculate Oaks within and around the field east of the A5 are also likely to provide habitat for range of species and potentially roost sites for bats. For this reason, the mature trees are of high ecological value. The single hole outlier sett along the northern boundary to the west of the A5 is not currently used by Badger. However, there is potential for this species to re-colonise the site.

6.2 Environmental Impact Assessment

In November 2008, a request for a formal screening opinion was submitted to confirm whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be required to accompany an outline planning application for development on this site.

The letter (Appendix A5) suggested that with reference to Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 (EIA Regulations) and guidance provided in Circular 02/99 Environmental Impact Assessment, that, providing a number of environmental surveys (Biodiversity, Ground Conditions and

Contamination, Noise and Vibration, Air Quality, Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, Water Resources and Landscape) are submitted as part of the outline planning application and any identified mitigation measures are implemented, that the proposed development should not be viewed as an 'EIA development' for the purposes of the EIA Regulations.

However, in accordance with the indicative thresholds provided in Annex 1, Circular 02/99 the proposals did constitute a Schedule 2 development by virtue of its size. EIA is not mandatory for all Schedule 2 developments but guidance states that formal EIA is required for Schedule 2 developments which are:

- major developments which are of more than local importance;
- proposed for a particularly environmentally sensitive or vulnerable location; and
- with unusually complex and potentially hazardous environmental effects.

It is not considered that redevelopment of this site is of a sufficient scale to be categorised as a major development. The proposals relate to the development for local employment purposes (the fact that the site is not likely to be included within the emerging Core Strategy would support this view).

It is not considered that the site is in a sensitive area. A sensitive area is defined in the Regulations as including: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); land subject to nature conservation orders under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; a national park or the Broads; a property on the World Heritage List; a Scheduled Monument; an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and a site given protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994 (Habitats Directive).

The site is located within open countryside, primarily used for grazing land, bordered to the north and east by agricultural

land, to the west by industrial use buildings and to the south by open countryside. There are no local or national statutory designations within 2 km of the site.

Finally, the nature of the scheme is not considered to be unusually complex or is expected to provide potentially hazardous environmental effects.

Early indications would however suggest that the OBC planning team may take a different view of this and request an EIA is submitted with the application. The request for an EIA principally relates to the uncertainty surrounding the boundary of the development resulting from the potential need to increase the boundary to accommodate highway improvements which would potentially increase the size of the development to more than 20 hectares (an indicative threshold where an EIA is more likely to be required). If this proves to be the case it will impact on the time and costs associated with preparing a planning application and the length of time for its determination.

6.3 Consultation on Planning Issues

OBC planners, whilst recognising and being highly supportive of the needs of the town's two key employers have raised the following issues, which would need to be overcome by an application:

- Development for employment purposes in this location is a departure from the Development Plan;
- The site is not considered to be of sufficient size to amount to 'strategic' employment land and as such will not be included in the emerging Core Strategy;
- Land at Weston Farm remains the allocated site in the extant Local Plan and further work would be required to establish that this is not likely to come forward prior to its potential de-allocation;

- Land at Mile End has not formed part of any previous consultations;

- The location of the land to the east and north of the A5 at Mile End breaks the 'collar' of the A5 around the town;

- The site at Mile End east is not sustainably connected to Oswesty;

- Any development should be spacious, surrounded by green space and landscaping, and of flagship quality, creating a new image and gateway for Oswesty; and

- Any large units should be well screened from the highway.

6.4 Site size

The site initially identified by OBC is 12.4ha in size. To this must be added space required for access, an enlarged island, green space, protection of gas mains in the north west corner of the site and operational safety space around cables. A series of different layout options (see plans in Appendix A7) were explored to ascertain whether it would be possible to accommodate these requirements on site, within the constraints identified, from which it was concluded that this could not be achieved.

**Figure 6.2. Extended site area and indicative layout
 (assuming all constraints removed) - submitted with
 Screening Opinion**



A small extension to the site was identified to the north-west, bringing the total site size to 15 hectares, and at AWM's request the assumption that the power cables would be buried was made. This showed that it may be possible to meet all requirements, but the development would still have high site coverage. See drawing overleaf which was submitted with the screening opinion.

6.5 Summary of Key Issues

- The site is not allocated for employment in the Development Plan and as such development of the nature proposed would constitute a 'departure'.
- The site known as Field Two, which was identified by OBC as the focus for the scoping study, is of an insufficient size to accommodate the requirements of the two employers and AWM;
- An extended site (including additional circa 2.5ha of land to the north east) if all constraints are removed, is physically capable of accommodating the requirements, but would not deliver these in a spacious 'parkland' setting;
- The HA is reluctant to agree to direct access from the trunk road until further work has been undertaken to demonstrate the planning case and the lack of alternative solutions;
- The existence of an 'allocated' employment site within the local plan means that the HA is likely to require modelling of the cumulative traffic impact from Weston Farm and the land east of Mille End;
- The costs of highways works are as yet unknown, but are likely to be significant;

- If not buried, the height of the cables across the site may be a problem for large vehicles passing beneath and may be required to be raised;
- The costs of diverting the extra high voltage cables which run through the centre of the city are likely to be circa £1M. The cost of diverting the lower voltage cables is circa £70,000. This would need to be done if the development was to fit on the 15 ha site.

- A small area of the site requires protection due to the presence of gas mains;
- There are ponds close by which could contain great crested newts, however if this is the case mitigation can be considered;
- OBC may require an application to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement with consequent impacts on costs and time; and
- There is a need to screen the large B2 buildings from the A5 frontage.

Alternative A Mile End east

This site includes Field Two plus all additional land to north and east of A5 in ownership of OBC. The advantages and disadvantages are summarised in the table below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Allows space for key employers and AWM to be met in spacious parkland setting	Departure from development plan – will become more significant if the site is enlarged, increasing the risk of a call in as it will have a greater impact on the countryside, establishing the built environment more firmly to the east of the A5. Concern by planners regarding sustainability of location due to location beyond A5 and 'disconnected' from town. Poor accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists. Site of sufficient size to be considered a 'strategic employment site'.
Provides scope for further employment land supply for the longer term	HA will require strong planning case, including clear evidence as to why Weston Farm will not come forward. May consider this as additional to Weston Farm. Impact on traffic flows on the A5. HA support may be hard to achieve. Land from the site required for junction improvements at Mile End, plus signalisation costs, plus possible improvements elsewhere on the network.

Figure 7.2 Alternative B

Advantages	Disadvantages
All land is within the ownership of OBC	Includes ponds with great created newt potential. Surveys not undertaken for enlarged site, so possible unknown environmental impacts. ES more likely to be required,
	Includes land with further 132,000KV cable route with associated constraints / costs

Alternative B Mile End, east and west, plus additional access land

This site includes Field One and Two, plus additional land for access to the west which is in third party ownership. (See figure 7.2 below).

This was the site examined by the previous Arup (2007) report. A traffic island would connect the site access road to the B4579 (Shrewsbury Road) at the junction with Maes-y-clawdd.

The advantages and disadvantages are summarised in the table opposite.

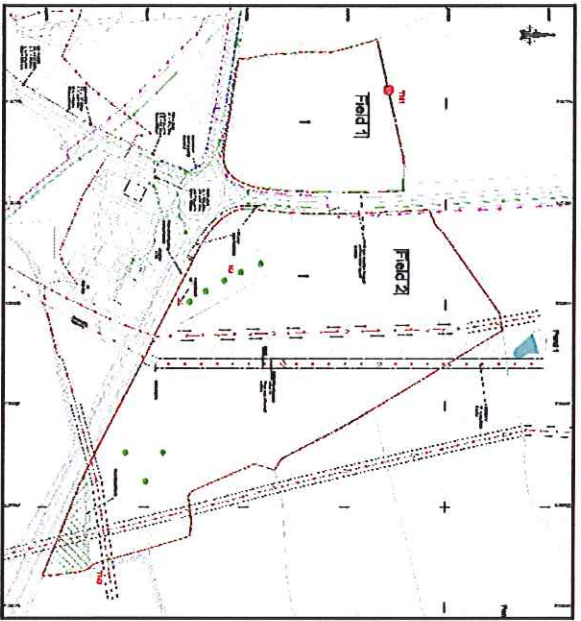


Figure 7.2 Alternative B

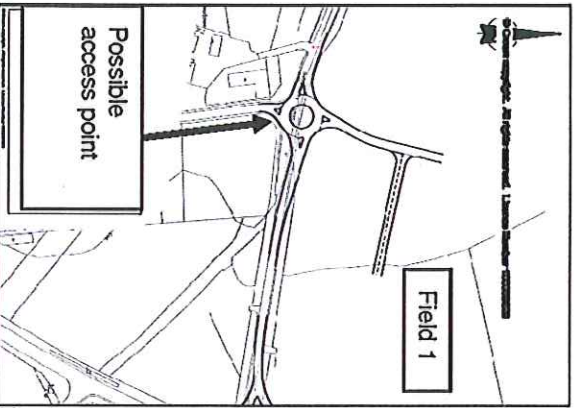


Figure 7.3 Possible access to field 1

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Access off local authority road network, preferred option by the HA. Potentially reduces the direct traffic impact on the HA road network – as not all movements would go through the Mile End Island.</p>	<p>Departure from development plan – requires strong justification.</p>
<p>Improved connectivity between the two sites and with the town. Pedestrians and cyclists would not have to cross the A5 to access the site.</p>	<p>HA will require strong planning case (due to allocation of land at Weston Farm). Cost of underpass and impact of land take required to deliver. HA indicated that underpass is preferred option.</p>
<p>Two prominent frontages – opportunity to create a strong gateway to the town.</p>	<p>Cables across field two may still be required to be buried.</p>
<p>Access road could open up land to north and west which may come forward for residential and other development.</p>	<p>Third party land issues to secure access from Shrewsbury Road.</p>
<p>Understood that adjoining land may be in the ownership of one of the major employers – may ease negotiations and delivery and avoid need for CPO</p>	<p>Field one has not been assessed for constraints and not included in ES scoping letter.</p>
<p>Opportunity to allocate employment site as part of larger mixed use (employment and residential) area through Core Strategy</p>	
<p>Space requirements could be accommodated.</p>	

Alternative C – Mile End West, plus additional land to north and west

This site includes the land to the west of the A5 in the ownership of OBC (Field One), together with an undefined amount of additional land to north and west, which is in third party ownership.

The advantages and disadvantages are summarised in the table below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Access off local authority road network - understood that support from HA already exists for access to additional land to north and east for residential purposes. For employment purposes, HA preferred access option off Shrewsbury Road.</p> <p>Reduces the traffic impact on the HA road network – as not all movements would go through the Mile End island.</p> <p>More sustainable location. Site entirely on the west of the A5 and hence has better connectivity with the town. Pedestrians and cyclists would not have to cross the A5 to access the site.</p>	<p>Departure from current development plan – requires strong justification – but given proposals for Core Strategy to include residential area to north and east, opportunity exists to extend to create 'mixed use' strategic site. This would strengthen planning case.</p>
<p>Key frontage to Mile End</p>	<p>Loss of potential future</p>

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>island – opportunity to create major gateway development with signature building.</p>	<p>residential land – will require replacement site elsewhere.</p>
<p>Understood that adjoining land may be in the ownership of one of the major employers – may ease negotiations and delivery and avoid need for CPO</p>	<p>Potential conflict with Core Strategy Policy Directions document (July 2009)</p>
<p>Opportunity to share new infrastructure with residential development -access road could open up land</p>	<p>Impact on value and amenity of future residential land. Screening and environmental impact mitigation measures may be required to protect amenities of new residential properties from B2 uses.</p>
<p>Space requirements could be accommodated.</p>	<p>Potential for third party land issues.</p>

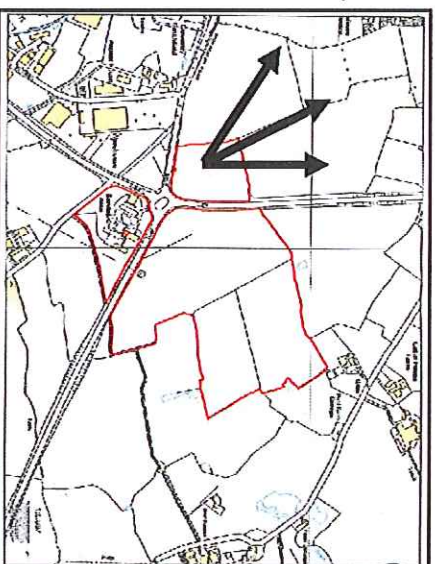


Figure 7.4 Mile End West, plus additional land to north and west.

Source: OBC

Weston Farm The advantages and disadvantages are summarised in the table below:

Policy LE2 notes "the site of 12 hectares adjacent to Weston Farm, Oswestry is allocated for employment development during the plan period as the first phase in establishing a larger industrial estate of 22 hectares in the Weston Farm Area."

It is understood from OBC and AWM that the inability to deliver this allocated site has primarily been due to land ownership issues.

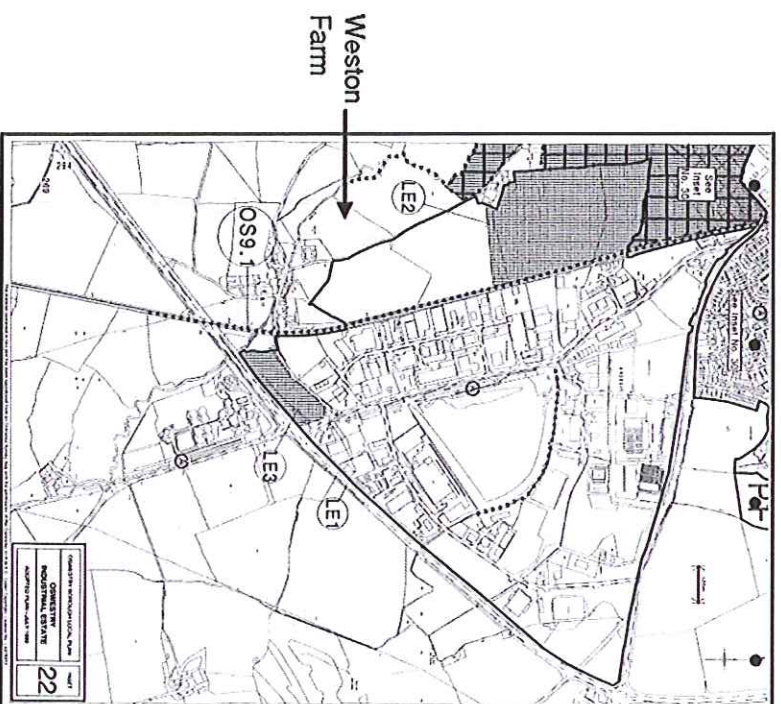


Figure 8.3 Extract from Local Plan – Weston Farm Site LE2

Advantages	Disadvantages
Allocated employment site	Understood that land ownership issues have delayed delivery of site – although mixed messages. CPO may be required to acquire land.
Work has already been undertaken to support an application. It is not clear as to the extent of any discussions with the HA and SCC although it is understood that limited improvement works will be required.	Site area very tight – when allowance is made for provision of an access road across railway, it looks as though site may not be able to accommodate all requirements.
HA aware of site and will continue to see it as 'developable' until de-allocated.	Access expensive as it requires crossing a railway line and purchase of land (possibly through CPO).
Site well screened from main town.	Site lacks prominence. Access through industrial area – not high profile / gateway.
Close to town and does not breach strategic road 'collar' to south	Site located on a major aquifer. Other environmental constraints may exist.
Landowner appears to remain willing to discuss development.	Infrastructure costs are high, particularly access.

The Planning Statement submitted in support of the Richard Burbidge Application ¹⁵ notes (para 7.10) that "the site requires considerable infrastructure investment to build a bridge over the railway and provide improved access. AWM made considerable progress in bringing this site forward with a bridge design having been prepared, agreement reached with the Highway Authority and Highways Agency on an access solution and a planning application and Environmental Statement prepared ready for planning submission. AWM had agreed, in principle, funding for the infrastructure to make the scheme commercially viable. However, AWM could not reach agreement with the landowners and hence has withdrawn its financial support for the proposal leading to the Mile End site being considered as an alternative. Vernon and Co have however had recent discussions themselves with the landowner of some 11.4ha of the land".

7.2 Comment

In an ideal world, the easiest site to bring forward in terms of the planning process is the allocated employment site at Weston Farm.

This site raises less issues with regard to the need to satisfy the HA regarding access and impact on the trunk road network. It appears that there has been some discussions with the HA in the past and some highway mitigation measures have been proposed, although it is not clear whether any agreements have been reached with the HA.

Despite the view of AWM and OBC that employment land values in the area are relatively high and that there is restricted employment land supply, the site at Weston Farm has not come forward for development. It is understood that this is due to a combination of commercial viability (see Section 8), land ownership issues and the costs of access

which requires a bridge across the line of the Cambrian railway (which may be re-opened for tourism and leisure purposes in the future).

Whilst work has not been undertaken to establish this site is capable of accommodating the requirements of the two employers and AWM, it is likely that once land for access and landscaping has been deducted, there will be insufficient space remaining within the phase one area to address all these needs. Some additional land is therefore likely to be required to meet all needs.

Taking forward land which is not included as an allocated site within the Development Plan, will require a strong planning case.

Alternative A (Mile End east) has some high infrastructure costs associated with its delivery, relating primarily to burying the high voltage cables and also requires works to Mile End island (assuming direct access is allowed by the HA – which will depend upon the strength of case which can be put forward). The prominent Gateway location of this site brings advantages in terms of land values and market attractiveness (which is important if occupiers are to secure financial support for relocation funding). See Section 8.

Alternative B (Mile End east and west) requires access through third party land and provision of an underpass below the A5. The cost of the underpass would be high, but is the more likely to be acceptable to the HA than direct access from the trunk road (see previous Arup report). Providing access from Shrewsbury Road could open up land to the north and west of Field One, which may come forward for residential development in the future (see section 4). Work may still be required to Mile End island. Land values would be high with two prominent frontage sites. The underpass improves the sustainability of the larger site (Mile End east) as it is better connected to the town.

Alternative C (Mile End west plus additional land to north and west) appears to offer the better fit with future planning policy. The Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation, Choice 5, offered the option of a mixed use urban extension in this area, to accommodate the future needs of Oswestry. It is also understood from OBC that access to this area for residential purposes may have been agreed in principle with the HA.

The inclusion of a significant employment site within this mixed use urban extension would offer a sustainable way forward, by virtue of its location and connectivity with the town, and could be taken forward through the planning process. Whilst ownership may remain an issue, it is understood that an interest is held in this area by one of the two employers seeking to relocate, which could facilitate delivery. The prominence of this site in terms of a Gateway to the town would bring added value (see section 8). There would however be a need to consider and mitigate the impact of B2 uses on other potential uses, particularly residential uses, within this area.

8.2 Summary of Findings

This study concluded

"8.2 What has become apparent from our investigations is that none of the three options provides a straightforward solution for development. Option 1 we are lead to believe would encounter the least resistance through the planning process, whereas both options 2 and 3 will require extensive consultations to enable them to become allocated employment sites within the emerging local plans".

8.3 Options 1 and 2 face significant access obstacles to overcome, requiring substantial capital expenditure. Options 1 and 2 will require significant grant assistance in order for them to be progressed as viable development opportunities. Option 2 has the added complication of existing power supplies that will require rerouting or burying in order for the site to be suitable.

8.4 Options 2 and 3 offer an opportunity to create added development value through the creation of a prominent gateway scheme, utilising the extended frontages to the A5. We believe that such a scheme would attract increased inward investment to Oswestry. We consider that a gateway development would attract rental / capital value premiums of at least 10% -15% over the more traditional employment areas within Oswestry.

8.5 Option 3 from our investigations is the least physically encumbered site of the three options. However, planning and ownership issues will need to be overcome through negotiations that could become protracted. With regards access both Shropshire County Council and the Highways Agency have previously indicated that

improvements to allow access to this option would be supported, albeit for residential purposes.

8.6 We consider Option 3 Extended Land at Mile End West to be the preferable option, taking into account location, access and fewer restrictions on development. We further consider this option to offer the best return on investment due to its prominence of location and ease of access to the A5 and the wider infrastructure network."

9 Assessment of Key Issues

	Mile End East -slightly enlarged Field Two. Original study site	Alternative A (Mile End east plus additional fields – direct access)	Alternative B (Mile End east & west plus access land)	Alternative C (Mile End west plus land to north and west)	Weston Farm (Allocated site)
Site size to accommodate all requirements	Very tight, only achievable if bury cables and little space around buildings	Meets all requirements with additional employment land for future	Meets all requirements	Dependant on site area identified – could meet all requirements	Work required – but looks to be too small. Additional land may be needed
Planning Policy	Departure – potential 'call in'	Departure – call in chances highest due to size and impact	Departure – potential 'call in'	Departure – call in less likely due to emerging policy direction and more sustainable location	Allocated
Highways Agency	Strong case required – improvements to Mile End island and other junctions	Hardest case due to increased movements from larger site, improvements to Mile End island and other junctions	Strong case required, but preferred solution – some improvement to network likely. Access across third party land.	Understand positive discussions have taken place between OBC & HA regarding residential access. Third party land involved.	Allocated – limited improvement to strategic network required, but land purchase / CPO required to deliver site and access.
Other Infrastructure – high voltage cables	High voltage cables	High voltage cables -more cables than other options	High voltage cables	Not assessed	Not assessed
Environmental issues	Limited impact – ES may be required. Not assessed small area included in site extension	Not assessed additional fields. ES more likely to be required. Ponds with Great Crested Newt potential.	Not assessed Field One. ES may be required	Not assessed.	Not assessed
Commercial Viability	Not assessed	Not assessed	Prominent gateway site. Direct access. High costs.	Prominent gateway site. Commercially viable.	No viable at present.
Ownership	OBC	OBC	OBC – third party land for access agreement / CPO needed -potential delay	OBC – third party land for access agreement / CPO needed -potential delay	Private ownership – agreement or CPO to bring forward. Potential delay.
Sustainability / connectivity to town	Severed by A5	Severed by A5	Linked by underpass	Good connectivity	Good connectivity

Figure 9.1 Comparison of Options

10 Conclusions and Way Forward

It is clear that there are a number of difficult issues relating to the short term deliverability of employment land within Oswestry.

When originally commissioned the report was intended to scope the actions and issues associated with the delivery of a

12.4 hectare site at Mile End east to meet the immediate needs of two of the town's major employers and Advantage West Midlands.

During the course of the investigations the brief was expanded to encompass a range of other alternative approaches to securing the delivery of the necessary employment land.

Table 9.1 in the preceding section provides a summary of the key issues identified as a result of this work.

10.1 Summary of the Findings

Weston Farm -From a planning perspective, land at Weston Farm is likely to have the easiest short-term passage through the planning system, due to its current allocation for employment purposes in the Local Plan. However it seems that there is little appetite by the landowners to bring this forward, a fact compounded by commercial viability issues identified by the Bulleys Report. As such, if this was considered the best site, considerable subsidy will be required alongside the possible use of Compulsory Purchase Powers. This would introduce delays, and add to the risks and costs.

Mile End east – original focus of the study and Alternative A - These two options focus on land to the east of the A5 and face the shared challenges relating to access from the A5 and the presence of pylons across the site. Both represent a departure from the development plan and have not been identified as potential sites for development as part of the Shropshire Core Strategy Issues and Options Choices for Oswestry. This makes the case to justify a 'departure' less

strong and in turn will impact on the view of the Highways Agency. Commercial viability issues have also been identified by Bulleys.

Alternative B (Mile End east and west plus access land) –

this site allows access difficulties to be overcome, but at a high cost. The provision of an underpass would link the employment site to the town more sustainably and effectively. Land ownership may be an issue, however there is the opportunity to link the provision of a new access to that required to open up the larger area of land to the north and west should this become the preferred option for growth in the Core Strategy. Despite the high value of the prominent gateway location, the viability of this option has been questioned by the Bulleys report, due to the cost of infrastructure.

Alternative C (Mile End west as part of a sustainable urban extension) -The option to deliver the employment site as part of a mixed use urban extension on land solely to the west of the A5 represents the most deliverable solution in the medium to longer term. The location connects to the town and residential areas, allows a gateway development to be delivered and avoids the difficulties associated with access directly from the A5. Given the identification of this area of land for a mixed use urban extension as part of Choice 5 in the recent Shropshire Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation, the medium to longer term planning difficulties are likely to be considerably reduced. There may however be an impact on the ability of the town to accommodate 750 houses in this area, and as a result a combination of the options put forward under choice 5 (of the Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation) may be required – for example some small sites around the town may be required to be identified for both residential and employment purposes.

10.2 Meeting the Need

The ability to meet the short term need for employment land within Oswestry does not have an immediate and obvious site solution. The allocated site would appear to have complex delivery and viability issues associated with its development. In such circumstances it is clear that de-allocation must be considered. Failure to do so will impact on the ability to bring forward other sites for employment use to meet the needs of Oswestry.

If the short-term needs of the area for employment land are to be progressed, then it would appear that the site best placed to achieve the wider range of outcomes required is land at Mile End West. This site is partially within the ownership of OBC and together with an adjoining area of land it forms the potential urban extension identified in the Shropshire Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation Document. This site could come forward as part of an early stage of a mixed use sustainable urban extension. If progressed as part of this strategic allocation, the risks associated with a potential 'call in' as a result of a 'departure' from the development plan, would be lessened as the evidence base would be in existence to support this otherwise 'premature' development. The risks will also reduce as the Core Strategy moves forward and greater weight is given (if taken forward) to this allocation.

In pursuing a short term 'departure' solution, the full engagement and support of the two employers who wish to relocate will be at the heart of any case. It is unlikely that the case for a departure, or 'premature' application would be successful if this immediate need, which cannot be satisfied elsewhere within the area, was not demonstrated. Before progressing with an application, it is also essential that support is in place from those who may have a planning policy interest including the relevant statutory consultees and Government Office for the West Midlands.

In the medium term, work on the Shropshire Core Strategy and the Site Allocations DPD will present the opportunity to examine in more detail issues relating to the potential de-allocation of land at Weston farm and the allocation of a deliverable 5 year rolling supply of deliverable employment land.

